IV. 5011

THE ESSENTIALS

OF

GOOD BINDING

A LECTURE DELIVERED

BEFORE

THE MASSACHUSETTS LIBRARY CLUB

BY

JOHN H. H. McNAMEE

1896

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The Author

PRESS OF LOMBARD & CAUSTIC,
26A BRATTLE ST., CAMBRIDGE.

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INTRODUCTORY

THE following lecture was delivered before the Librarians' Club of Massachusetts, at their meeting in Lowell.

Mr. McNamee has received so many requests for copies that he has put it in this form. The text is taken from a report contained in the Cambridge Tribune.

"One of the most interesting papers read before the Massachusetts Library Club at Lowell was that of Mr. John H. H. McNamee of this city, bookbinder to the University. His subject was: 'The Essentials of Good Binding.' Mr. McNamee had made preparations to explain his lecture by bringing with him, as nearly as possible, a complete lay-out of bookbinders' materials and implements. These

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were spread over a large table at one end of the hall. A young lady was in attendance, who showed by actual working, the different methods of folding, sewing, and putting together a book from the time it leaves the printer's hands until it was ready for the journeyman bookbinder. The paper is as follows:"

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Mr. President and Members: It was with a great deal of hesitation that I consented to appear before your honored body in the role of a lecturer, because I felt that a man who had confined himself closely to the details of his business for the last twenty years, and who had during that time looked to the development and improvement of the actual manual labor which enters into it, and the solving of the many interesting problems connected with the work, rather than to acquiring a perfect command of language (so necessary to the public speaker), was better fitted to perform the labor required rather than to intelligently explain it. Again I knew I was to appear before a society of the most intelligent minds of Massachusetts, minds fully capable of selecting the true from the false, and that would not be satisfied with

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statements which could not be verified. It would be the height of presumption on my part to present to you an historical sketch of the art of bookbinding, as many of you are much better informed on that branch of the subject under discussion than I can ever hope to be. Therefore I shall confine myself to that which I know is uppermost in the mind of everyone present, the practical side of the trade. In order to derive the points necessary to come to a conclusion on this most important subject, I will ask your close attention while I take two or three different specimens through the process known to the trade as extra binding. As the first essential for good binding is good printing, we will first examine the printed sheet.

As the work which is sent from the modern public library to the bookbinder has generally been bound in some form before reaching the librarian, I will spend only a

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very short time in explaining to you the method of handling the sheets as they come from the printer. The size of a book is generally known by the number of pages printed at one impression, or on each side of the sheet, as fo. 2 pages, and when folded makes two leaves; 4to, 4 pages; 8vo, 8 pages; 12mo, 12 pages, etc.

I will now fold an octavo sheet, which will give all the information required to understand this simple operation. Lay the sheets on the bench with the signature (a letter or figure which appears at the bottom of the first page on the sheet) facing down and to the left. The right edge of the sheet is now raised and brought over to the left, and after placing the folios or page numbers exactly together, and holding them in that position, carefully crease down the centre with a bone folder held in the right hand. This process is continued according to the number of pages printed

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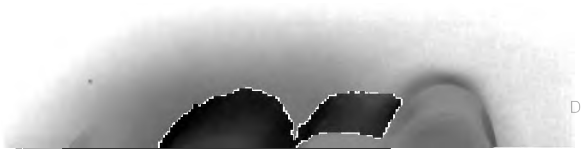
on the sheet by bringing all the pages together, so as to run in correct numerical order when the sheet is done. If the signature is not on the front of the folded sheet, the pages have been put together incorrectly. When the whole edition of each signature has been so treated these sheets are placed in piles on a long bench, when a sheet is taken from each pile in rotation and placed together, forming the volume ready for pressing. But all books that have been bound before must be pulled to pieces or separated into their original folds by taking each sheet away singly, and carefully removing all threads and glue or paper that may have adhered to the folds from the former binding. Frequently the old binding adheres with such tenacity that it becomes necessary to soften the back in order not to tear the outside fold.



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If the book has formerly been bound in pamphlet form, that is, with a simple paper cover, it will now be ready for pressing. If the volume has been bound in regular form or with board cover, the book must be taken in small sections, and the lip or joint at the back into which the board of the cover sets must be laid on an iron and hammered down flat to its original shape with the beating hammer. The books are now divided into sections of about a dozen signatures, and placed between irons and subjected to great pressure. The pressing of a book is one of the most important features, for unless a certain solidity is obtained a book will never retain its shape. Upon taking the sheets from the press they are prepared for sewing.

We now come to what must be considered the most important work upon the book, because on this depends not only its strength, but also its shape and manner

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of opening. Generally speaking, we use four methods of sewing books that are to be bound permanently, viz.: By sawing in and sewing on cords let into the grooves left by the saw. By sewing on raised cords that stand out from the backs, or as it is called in the trade, "flexible." This is the oldest method employed by bookbinders, and for bibles, dictionaries, and all books intended to lie open perfectly flat, is undoubtedly the best. By sewing on tape or parchment instead of the cord, and whipstitching, which is generally confined to books filled with plates and all books composed of single leaves. After the book has been carefully collated, or looked over to see that it is perfect, and all plates and maps, if there be any, are in their right places, it is jogged carefully on the back and head, and placed in a press with the back protruding up over the face of the press about one-half inch. If the

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book is to have an open or spring back it is marked and carefully sawed into about one-sixteenth of an inch deep, or to fit the cords used for each band, and also about one-half inch from the top and three-fourths of an inch from the bottom for the kettle stitches, which are chain stitches at each end. All volumes up to the 8vo should be sewed on at least three bands or cords, 4tos and larger volumes on four or more bands. But if the book is to be sewed flexible, or on raised bands, with what is known to the trade as a tight back, it is marked with a pencil and straight edge after dividing off the back carefully and in proper proportion for the bands, and sawing in for the kettle stitches. If the book is to be sewed on parchment or tapes, then it is barely scored with the hand saw just the width of the tape used, and sawed in the usual manner for the kettle stitches.

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We now select the cord to be used, and cut off the number of lengths needed for the bands, and after fastening them to the fore edge of the bed of the bench and cross-bar above, screw up the bar until the cord is perfectly taut. The bands are now placed at a distance apart to correspond with the pencil or saw marks on the back of the volume, which is held against them as a guide.

In flexible or raised band books the first and last sections have a narrow strip of cloth pasted along the outside of the backs, and we then proceed by opening and laying the first section against the bands, and inserting the needle through the kettle stitch hole at the right and passing it along to the left of the nearest band with the left hand (which has opened the sheet at the centre), and forcing it through the paper at that point. The needle is now taken by the right hand and forced back again at the

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right side of the band, thus forming a complete circle around the band. This is repeated for each band, and the needle brought out at the left kettle stitch. Another sheet is placed on and the needle enters the left kettle stitch hole, and the process continued to the right end, when the thread is fastened by a knot to the end which has been left hanging from the point where first introduced into the section. Proceed with the third section in like manner, after which the needle is inserted between the first and second sections, and passed around the thread forming the chain or kettle stitch. The thread must be drawn tightly at each band and fastened tightly at each kettle stitch, or the sheet will work loose and shift. As each needleful of thread is used it must be carefully joined to the next with a small close knot, making a continuous thread through the book. I always use silk for flexible

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work as it is stronger and more pliable, also making less swelling than linen thread of equal strength. The cord used must be selected to suit the size of the book, a larger volume taking a heavier cord. The thread must agree in thickness with the thickness of the signature; the thinner the signature the thinner must be the thread, as, if too thick a thread is used, the swelling produced will make it impossible to get a proper round or shape to the back. The sheets must be knocked or pressed down occasionally with a beating stick to make the back even all along. This method takes far more time than that employed for ordinary books, which is as follows:

The bands are set up in the same manner and the thread passed through the kettle stitch, but instead of coming out at the left of the cord and going round it, it comes out at the right, and passing across

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the front of the cord goes in at the left, and the cord itself is forced into a groove made by the saw in the sheet. The kettle stitch is made in the same manner as before. This method is used on all books intended to have much gilding on the backs, as in flexible books the leather being attached directly to the leaves bends each time the book is opened, and throws out or splits off the gilding in time. For this reason, also, flexible work is always covered with a grain leather such as morocco, as a leather with a smooth or ungrained surface will show a crease down the back each time the volume is opened. If a book is composed of very thin sections it may be sewed by putting what is called "two sheets on" at the same time and treating them as one, by bringing the needle out at the right of the first band in the lower section and into the upper section at the left of the band, and passing along

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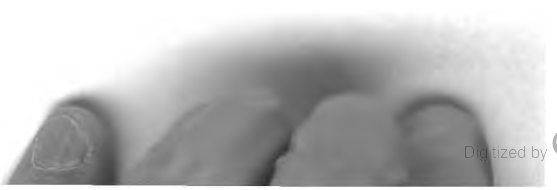
to the next band, coming out at the right and entering at the left in the lower section, and alternating in this manner until the opposite kettle stitch is reached. This method takes only half as much thread, producing so much less swelling. The first and last sections of each book are overcast for strength. When a book has been cut before sewing, great care must be taken to open the signatures in the centre, for if this is not done the middle fold of two leaves will drop out when the book is opened.

Books sewed on tape or parchment are treated in just the same manner as for ordinary sewing, the tape taking the place of the cord used in that process. Very heavy blank books are sewed on parchment; ordinary blank books on tapes. The tape being on the outside of the leaf the books open well. Music is often sewed on tapes. Single leaved books are



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glued on the back and sawed in the regular way, then separated into small sections, and each section is carefully overcast or whipstitched about one-eighth inch from the back edge. The sections are then sewed on to the cords in the same manner as before. In cheap books the back is glued, a small section taken off and laid against the cord and whipstitched around the cord, the thread employed serving both purposes at the same time. Flexible and whipstitched books are sewed with a sharp pointed needle, common books with a blunt pointed one.

I have tried many kinds of thread, and have suffered the usual hardships which every binder must pass through until he obtains an article that will stand the test of all kinds of sewing. I have for many years past used nothing but Hayes' Irish linen thread, and while there may be an article equal to it for endurance and tentative

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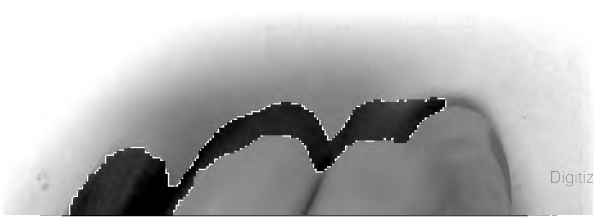
strength, I have never found it, and therefore while I may be accused of prejudice in its favor, still I have determined to hold fast to that which I know is good. While this firm's goods may be a trifle higher in price they are the cheapest in the long run, and will give that great strength so necessary to a volume which receives the rough usage of our modern library.

When the book is sewed it is taken from the bench, and the cords cut off to within about three inches of the leaves. It is now ready for the forwarder, so called, because he takes the book along a stage farther. His work begins by jogging the books perfectly at head and back on an iron, and hammering the book along the back to make it perfectly even and take out all unnecessary swelling. This process requires good judgment on the part of the workman, as on it depends in a great degree the future shape of the volume.



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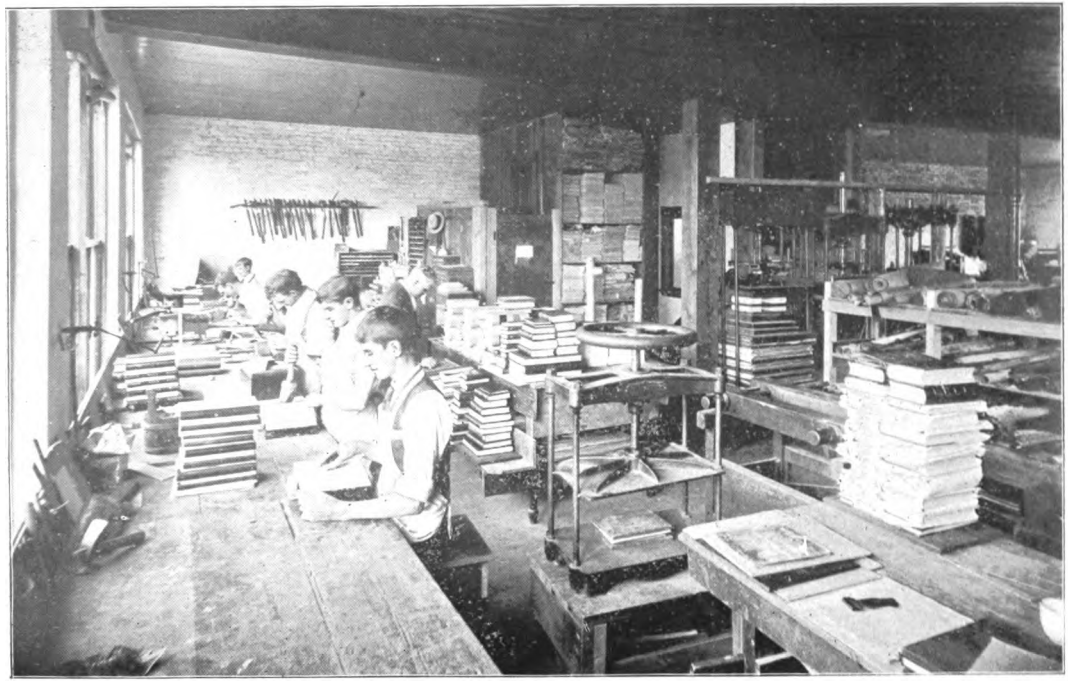

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The cords are now pulled tight, and the first and last signature pasted to its neighbor. End papers, made by pasting folds of marble paper to white papers cut the size of the volume, are now attached to the volume, and the book is ready for cutting.

After cutting, a coat of thin glue is spread on the back and worked into the crevices between the sheets to prevent them from splitting apart while being hammered into shape. When dry they are rounded and backed. (Mr. McNamee here described minutely the process of lining up, covering, finishing and lettering, siding and pasting up, and all the details necessary to complete a leather bound volume.)

The stock or material used by bookbinders in the covering of books consists of paper, cloth or leather. Paper is very little used except as temporary covers for

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pamphlets, or cheap jackets for books intended to be bound again. Cloth is used in larger quantities than any other material as it can be worked easily and quickly, and takes the embossing and gilding in such a manner as to please the eye of the general public. In fact, some of the combinations sent out by our large publishers are very creditable specimens of the art, and show exquisite taste in the general treatment. Canvas or "duck," as it is generally known to the trade, has, within the last few years, come into very general use for the binding of books that are subjected to the hard wear of our public libraries, and has proved one of the most satisfactory coverings that has yet appeared. It is strong and lasting, and as one librarian has expressed it, wears like iron. For books that are bound simply for preservation I firmly believe that cloth or canvas will prove more lasting than any other material, with the possible

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exception of vellum or the very best grade of levant morocco.

I have brought here specimens of vellum, levant morocco, Persian, sheep, roan, skiver, calf, American cowhide and buffing, and imitation morocco, which is also a sheep skin. I have also specimens of books bound at different times, from the sixteenth century down to the present date. In examining these volumes we may come to some conclusion as to the relative value of each kind of stock. The vellum and levant morocco and also the plain morocco, although bound for centuries, still retain their strength to a wonderful degree, and the cloth volumes, although bound fully half a century, show very little effect of the ravages of time. All the other leathers show their utter worthlessness by the manner in which they have yielded to and become entirely decayed by the action of the atmosphere. It may be said that

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these books may not all have been subject to the same conditions, but it is fair to assume that these old volumes during their existence must have been used as roughly and been through as severe climatic changes as any of our comparatively modern volumes. For a rich dressing, and one which will be all that the greatest lover of books could desire for his most cherished volumes, levant morocco is, *par excellence*, the most beautiful and capable of taking the finest adornment of any leather known to the art. While all this is especially true of "levant," still our best grade of morocco, while being much cheaper, is, taken all in all, the leather in which books that are intended for daily reference and use should be bound, as it has the merit of retaining its life and standing more hard knocks, and yet keeping a good appearance, than any of the leather in common use to-day. So much do I

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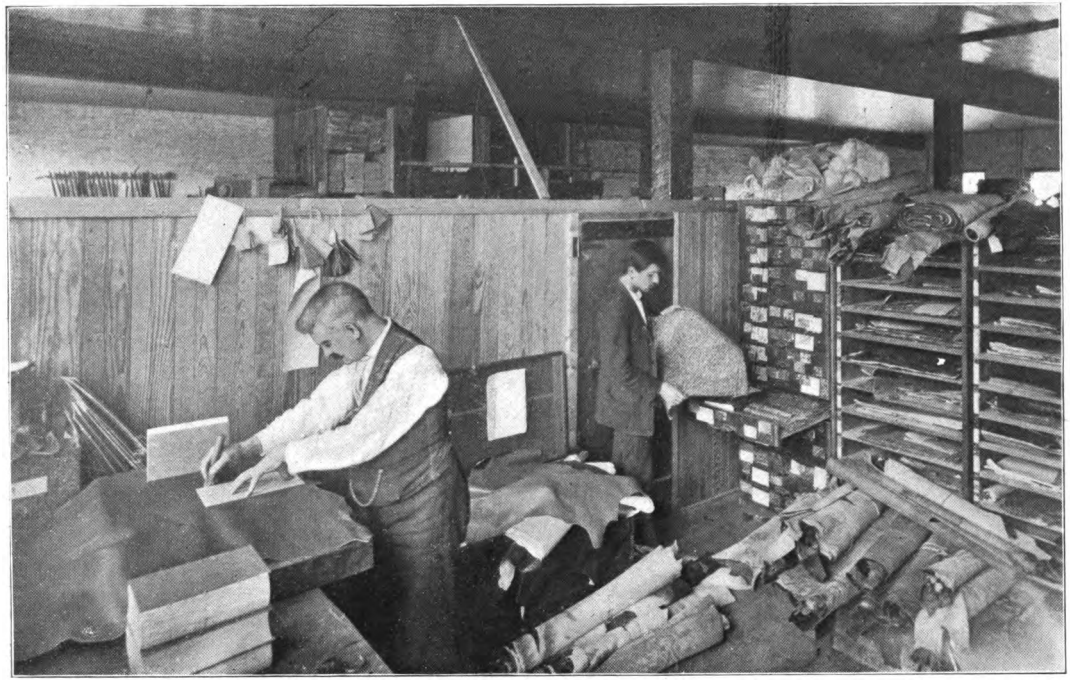

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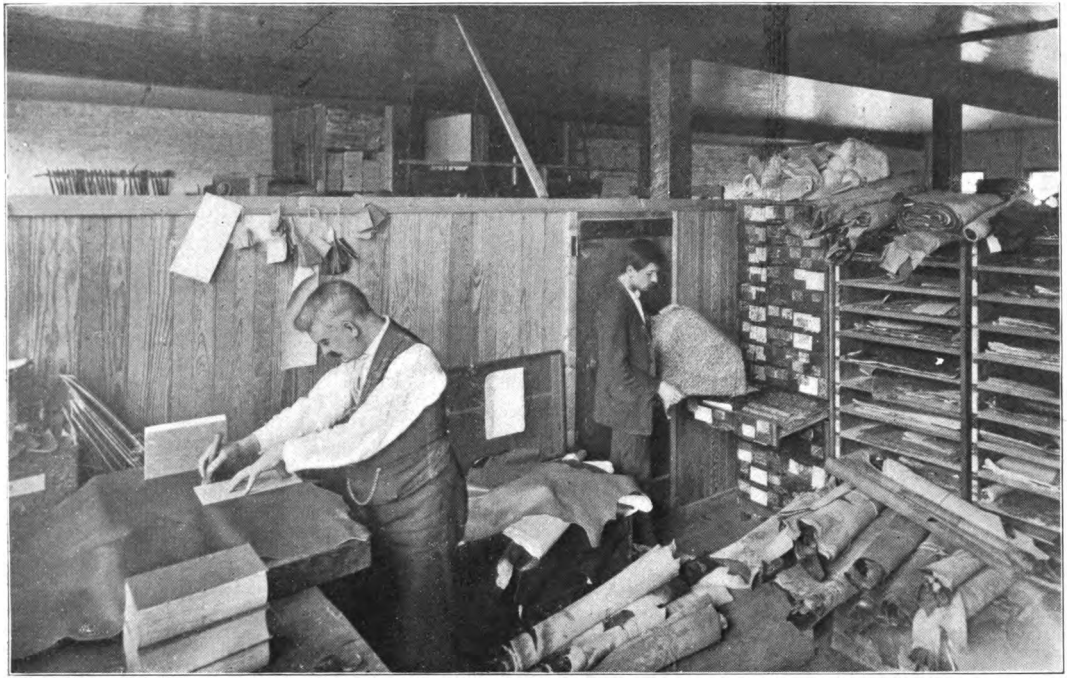

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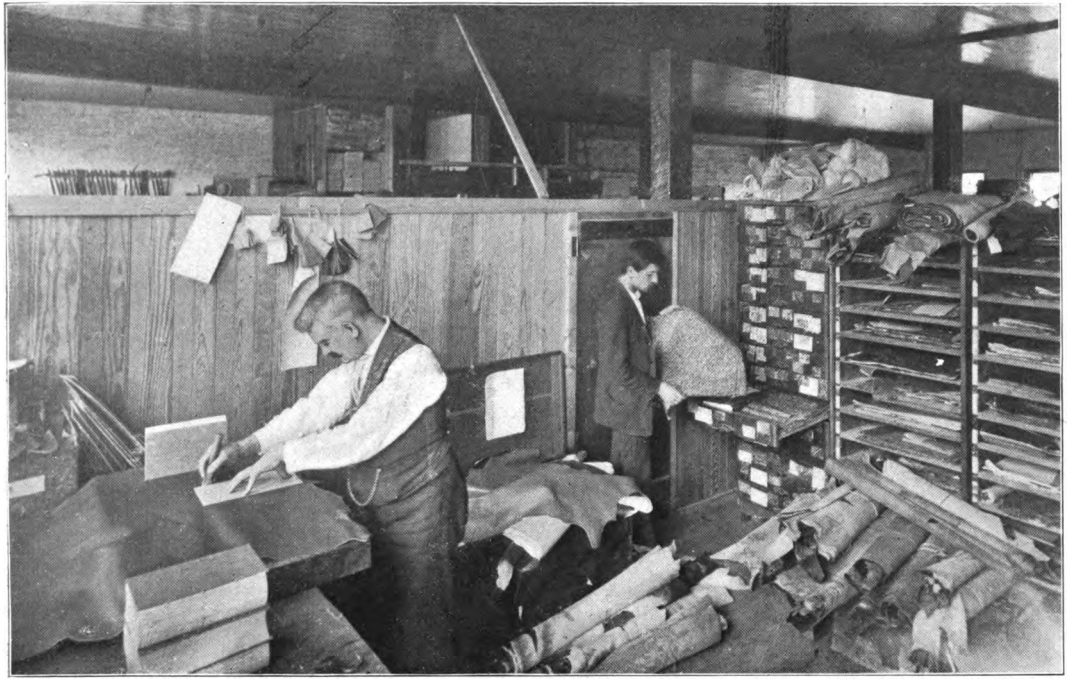

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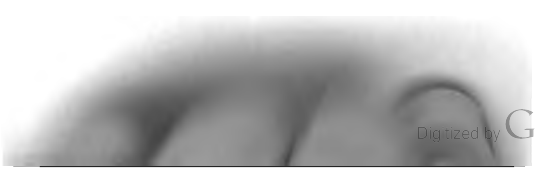
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believe in morocco that it is the only medium priced leather that, as a bookbinder, I can conscientiously recommend.

Had I the ordering of bindings for any public or circulating library where books are given out to all classes of people and subjected to the handling which such books must receive, I should, from my experience as a binder, recommend the following rules: For the smaller volumes of juveniles, novels and perishable books (by which I mean books which are popular for a short time and then may lie on the shelves almost as so much lumber), have each book pulled to pieces and well sewed with Hayes' linen thread on narrow linen tapes, with edges carefully trimmed. Have the books rounded and backed, but not laced in. Have the boards placed away from the backs about one-fourth of an inch, in order to give plenty of room for them to swing easily and avoid their pulling off the first and last

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signatures of the book when opened. Give the back and joint a lining of super or cheese cloth. Have them covered with American duck or canvas pasted directly to the leaves, pressed well and given plenty of time to dry under pressure, and so avoid as much as possible all warping of boards and shrinkage of the cloth. For all large folios, newspapers and kindred works use heavy canvas, as it is somewhat cheaper than sheep and as easily worked. Have them sewed strongly on the requisite number of bands, every band laced into the boards, which should be made by pasting two heavy binders' boards together, to prevent warping and give solidity to the volume.

The reason I say lace in large volumes is that the heavy books will sag and pull out of covers by their great weight, unless tightly fastened to a solid board, thus giving the book a good foundation to stand on.

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For all periodicals not bound in leather I should prescribe the same treatment. These volumes can be lettered in ink on the canvas, or in gold, on a colored leather label pasted on the cloth. But for all books which are destined to be bound in leather I should surely, and without any hesitation whatever, order morocco, and by this I mean goat skin, and I should go still further and demand a good German or French goat. Boards hard and laced in at every band, super joints, full, open backs, lettering clear and distinct, and the paper on the sides to match the leather.

I would also recommend that a schedule be used, giving a space for schedule number, then the name of book or books or lettering to be used on each volume, space for the number of volumes, space for description of binding, and finally for price: thus giving the binder a complete order on a large sheet, which he is in no danger of

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losing. All he will have to do is to mark on the title of each volume, in small figures, its schedule number, and, when the books are done, put down the prices and add up the column of figures and make out his statement as per the number of schedule. This method gives the librarian a complete list of volumes sent and returned, and by laying away these schedules she has for handy reference a very complete list of prices. It saves the binder from writing out the name of each volume on his bill, and as the librarian must keep a list of books sent, why not keep them this way as well as any other? I have mislaid or lost hundreds of lettering slips, which are the bane of a bookbinder's existence. Lay down some rules for the cutting of books, placing of plates, binding of covers and advertisements, style of lettering, etc., and have your binder follow them.

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Don't ever cut with a folder before sending to binder, as it makes the sewing more difficult.

Don't pull to pieces or take out titles and indexes. The binder always takes care of that.

Don't take off ads, as it sometimes leaves unsightly tears or takes away pages, and if all leaves are paged the binder is at a loss to know if the book is complete.

Don't ever use mucilage or glue. Your bookbinder will send you a little paste, or you can make it by boiling flour and water and sprinkling in a little salt. If you wish to keep it for a long time, mix a few drops of oil of clove with it and seal up.

Of course, there are cases where some of these rules don't apply, such as volumes made up from leaves taken from several other volumes or pamphlets. In case of a book of this kind place every leaf in correct order, and write directions very carefully.

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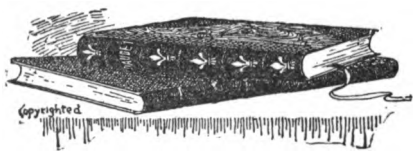
J. H. H. McNAMEE,

BOOK-BINDER

TO HARVARD UNIVERSITY.



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All kinds of Printed Books, bound in Calf, Morocco, Sheep, Roan, Russia or Cloth, with either Gilt, Marbled or Plain Edges. We make a Specialty of Fine Tooled Bindings with Old-Fashioned English Flat Backs, Gilt Tops and Uncut Edges. Blank Books Made to Order. Photographs Mounted. Blocking of Every Description. Pamphlets either Thread or Wire Stitched. Music Bound so as to Lie Open Well

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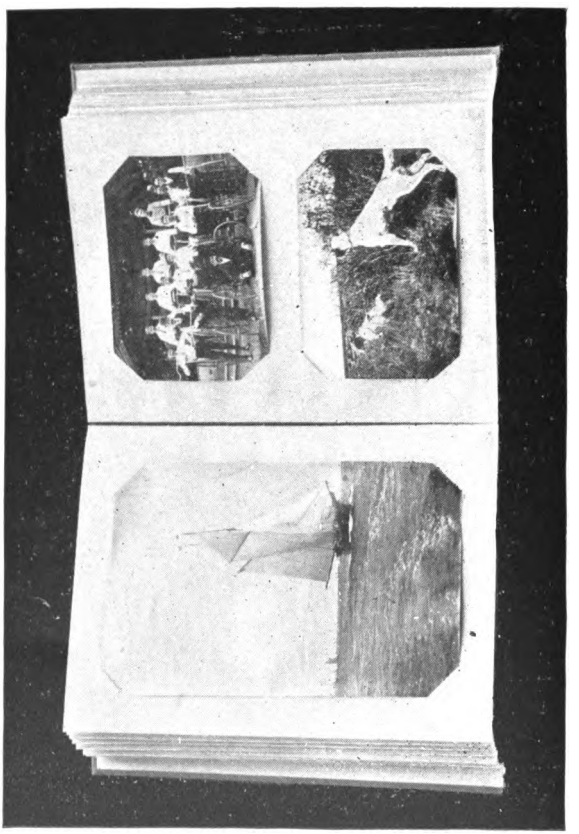

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THE PHOTO-BIND

12 1-2 x 16 with Fifty Double Leaves, Price, $3.00.

10 x 12 1-2 with Thirty-six Double Leaves, Price, $2.00.

OTHER SIZES MADE TO ORDER AT SPECIAL RATES.

The Photo-Bind is a book made with a double or folded leaf of paper with the fold at the front. The Photos have their corners inserted in slits cut in the leaf, thus taking one or more to each side of the leaf according to the size of the Photo. The folded double leaf hides the inserted ends and forms a very neat and compact binding.

Of the small size we have two styles, one that opens in the usual way and one that opens on the end. They are bound in full crash, but can be put in any binding desired.

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JOB BINDING.

We are distinctively job binders, and confine ourselves to the old-fashioned method of binding by hand, as our experience teaches us this is the only correct method of making a book that will be at once strong and rich looking. We have the most experienced work-people that money can secure, and buy only the very best leather and other stock that is brought into this country.

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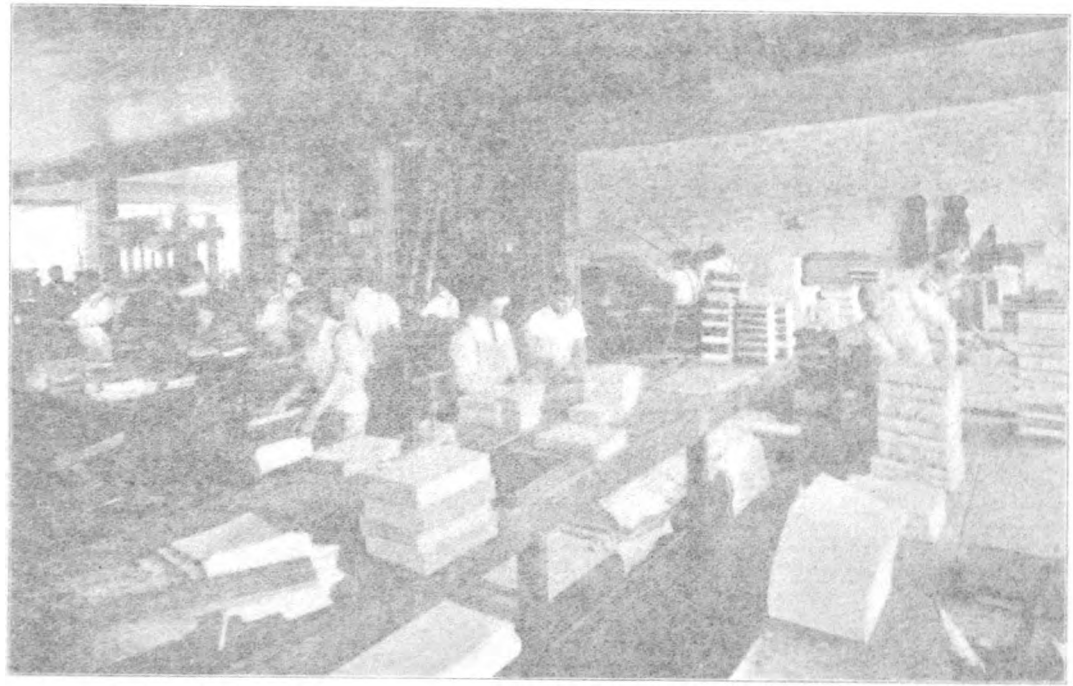

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OUR WORK SHOP.

We present here views of our work rooms which contain over 3,000 square feet, and are lighted on three sides, thus giving a window to each of our many workmen. These views were taken with our people at work, and convey some idea of the many processes through which a volume must pass before completion.

For many years we have employed over thirty persons, and our shop when viewed by an outsider, seems a perfect beehive. Mr. McNamee believes that a customer should know something of the process, and always takes great pleasure and pains to show visitors about the work-shop and explain all the details of manufacture.

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OUR STOCK.

We have by far the largest and most varied stock of fancy leathers and papers to be found in this country, and have been collecting different styles and patterns of finishing tools for twenty years. We are thus enabled to match any kind or style of a book, no matter where or how long bound. We take an especial pride in making our work look superior to any pattern submitted to us.

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BEST MOROCCO.

We always advise our customers to use morocco leather on their volumes, where the value of the books will warrant the outlay. Now when we say morocco, we mean the very best turkey morocco that can be purchased, and selected from the finest goat skins. Mr. McNamee will not have a skin of "persian," or imitation morocco, which is nothing more or less than sheep skin grained to imitate the morocco skin, in his bindery, and therefore is sure that by no possible chance can his men use anything but the best.

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COLLEGE AND SCHOOL WORK.

We make a specialty of binding for colleges and public libraries, and a visit to our workshop will convince one that we have the patronage of the finest libraries of New England.

Mr. McNamee will be glad of the opportunity to visit any library and give prices and submit samples.

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PUBLIC LIBRARY WORK.

For twenty-five years we have made a study of the binding of the cheaper styles of library work, and firmly believe we have produced a book that will stand the wear and tear of our public library circulation. We sew with the very best Irish linen thread, on linen tapes, reinforce the thick plates when necessary, and use the best quality of American crash for a covering. These books open perfectly, as we use a flexible glue of our own manufacture, that we know, from years of use, is not only flexible, but also strong.

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BINDING OF GIFT BOOKS.

We always have in our work rooms a number of costly volumes intended for gifts. These, of course, are entrusted only to our very finest workmen and receive the greatest possible amount of care and attention. One lately bound, in full white levant, with red and gold edges, and finished with a *Grolier* design, inlaid with ribands of blue and doublee of same color, was a most delicate example. It was a gift to one of the crowned heads of Europe. Three volumes in full crimson crushed levant were sent as a present to the King of Siam, while the dainty volume, the picture of which we present as the frontispiece to this book, was in full cream morocco, carefully tooled and lined with cream satin. This was a gift to a happy couple on their golden wedding day. Our facilities for doing this style of work are certainly not surpassed in this part of the country.

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CLEANING AND PLATE WORK.

Cleaning and inlaying plates for extra illustrated work. We have every facility for doing, and a most careful and competent workman who takes entire charge of all work of this class entrusted to our care. We are fully aware of the anxious moments passed by the book illustrator, after collecting his plates for years perhaps and at great expense of time and money, until the return of his precious volumes from his binder. Mr. McNamee is himself a collector of odd volumes and always demands from his workmen that they use a book of this class as a well cherished friend and treat it accordingly.

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Mr. McNamee gives his personal attention to every volume that comes under his care, and work that is sent him by express will receive the same careful scrutiny as if the owner was on the premises. We do not intend to have any errors in our work, but should any defect be found we always stand ready to remedy them.

SCHEDULES.

We have a quantity of schedules ruled to a convenient size which we will be glad to send to any of our customers.

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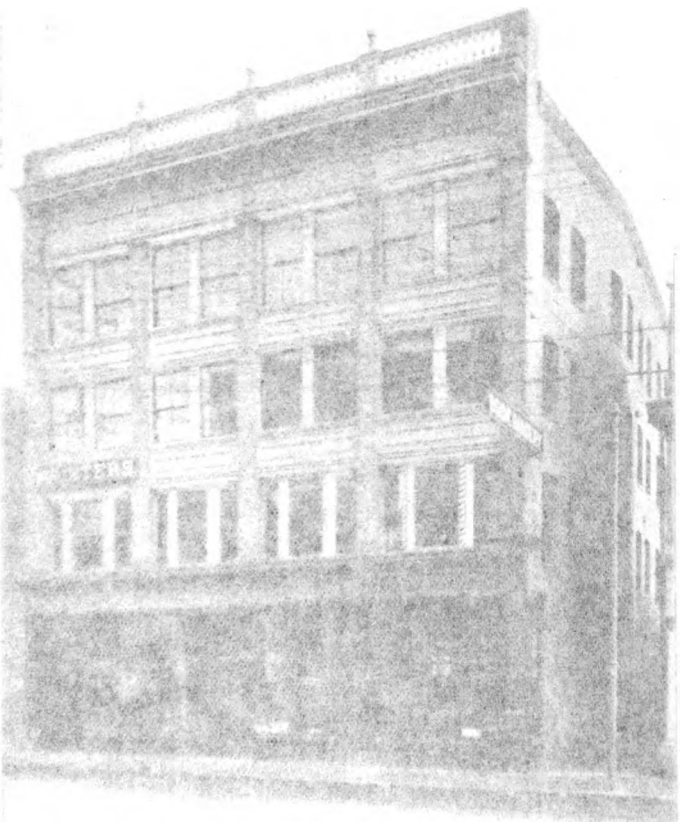

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ANNOUNCEMENT.

The undersigned would most respectfully announce to the customers of John H. H. McNamee that they have one of the finest and most modern Book, Job and Printing Establishments in the State, with facilities for the rapid execution of fine printing in all its branches.

The testimonial received from Worcester Lodge, printed on the next page, is one of many. We are the printers of the Cambridge Latin and High School Review, the largest school paper in the world.

They will be pleased to submit estimates and show samples of their printing.

This book is a specimen of our work.

LOMBARD & CAUSTIC,

McNamee's Building, over Post-office,

26A BRATTLE ST., CAMBRIDGE.

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FROM WORCESTER LODGE, NO. 56, I. O. O. F.

WORCESTER, MASS., May 27, 1896.

MESSRS. LOMBARD & CAUSTIC,

Gentlemen:

At a regular meeting of Worcester Lodge, No. 56, I. O. O. F. it was unanimously voted to extend a vote of thanks to you, and also express our very great satisfaction at the excellent manner in which you performed your part of the work on our Historical Address. It more than meets our expectations and is a fine piece of printing in every particular. We only regret that we have not more work to give you. Should we be at any time able to serve you please advise us.

Yours respectfully,

FRED A. POLAND, *Secretary.*

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